

Fort Hill
(McElhenny-Calhoun-Clemson House)
Clemson University Campus
Clemson
Pickens County
South Carolina

Habs No. SC-344

HABS
SC,
39- CLEM,
1.

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORT HILL
(McElhenny - Calhoun - Clemson House)

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Location: Clemson University Campus, Clemson, Pickens County, South Carolina.

Present Owner: Clemson University.

Present Use: Historic house museum.

Significance: For the last 25 years of his life, Fort Hill was the home of John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), one of America's most prominent politicians and political theorists. Later, the house was occupied by Calhoun's son-in-law, Thomas G. Clemson (1807-1888), scientist, agriculturalist, and founder of Clemson University. Architecturally, the house is interesting for its Greek Revival details and evolutionary development.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: ca. 1802-1850.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The original owner was the Reverend James McElhenny, pastor of the Old Stone Church. Upon McElhenny's death, the house passed into the hands of Mrs. John Ewing Calhoun, John C. Calhoun's mother-in-law. From 1825 until 1836, John C. Calhoun rented the property from her and then gained full possession upon her death. Calhoun died in 1850, but the house remained in family possession. Notably, Calhoun's son-in-law, Thomas G. Clemson was owner from 1872-1888. In his will the property was given to the State of South Carolina for the establishment of an agricultural college. The will also stipulated that the house be preserved in perpetuity.
4. Alterations and additions: The original ca. 1802 portion of the house was a simple four-room building with its front entrance on the north facade. During their years there, 1825-1850, the Calhouns enlarged the house to its present fourteen-room size, added the portico and porches, and reoriented the main entrance to the east. Many of these alterations were designed by Floride Bonneau Calhoun, Calhoun's wife. During the 1930's, the house was restored by the South Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

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B. Historical Context:

John C. Calhoun came to live at Fort Hill in 1825, the year that he was inaugurated as Vice-President of the United States. During the previous two decades, Calhoun had served in a variety of political posts, including State legislator, United States Congressman and Secretary of War. During the 1820's and 1830's, Calhoun expounded and developed his theories of state's rights, suggesting in 1828 the recourse of state nullification of federal law. After resigning the Vice Presidency, he went on to serve as Secretary of State and United States Senator while remaining the champion of state sovereignty and of the rights of minority factions. Fort Hill was Calhoun's much beloved retreat from public life, and it is there that much of his influential political philosophy was formulated and drafted.

Calhoun's son-in-law, Thomas G. Clemson, was another noted resident of Fort Hill, and one who profoundly impacted the house's future. Clemson lived with the Calhouns at Fort Hill during the 1840's and returned there as owner during his old age in the 1870's and 1880's. A scientist and agriculturalist, Clemson was appointed as the country's first Superintendent of Agriculture in 1860. His interest in agriculture and science led him to the decision to promote an agricultural and mechanical college in South Carolina. In the terms of his will, Fort Hill and its surrounding acreage were deeded to the state for that purpose, although the house itself was specifically required to be preserved. Thus, as a result of Clemson's will, Fort Hill is presently a historic house museum, surrounded by the buildings of Clemson University.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Developed over the years from a simple 4-room house, the present 14-room building is distinguished by large Greek Revival porches and porticos.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: L-shaped; 2 1/2 stories; 1-story addition to rear.
2. Foundations: Fieldstone walls, brick piers.
3. Walls: Frame, sheathed in clapboards and flush siding.

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4. Porches: On the north facade there is a pedimented portico supported by four Tuscan columns of molded brick. On the east facade is a 2-story, 4-bay porch supported by similar columns. On the southern portion of the western facade is a similar porch, partially enclosed, supported by wooden columns.
5. Chimneys: Three exterior and one interior chimneys; brick covered by stucco.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Entrance on north facade; two entrances on east front; wooden panelled doors; north door and one of east doors capped by transoms.
 - b. Windows: 9/9 double hung sashes on first floor; 6/9 sashes on second floor; louvered shutters.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Gable roofs; shed-roof porches and rear addition.
 - b. Cornice: Simple cornice, with shallow panelled modillion blocks.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Asymmetrical arrangement of fourteen rooms.
 - A. First floor: Small hall at entrance. South room is the parlor, north room is the formal dining room. Adjoining the dining room is the master bedroom. There is another hall at the northern entrance. To the right of this hall is the original kitchen of the house.
 - b. Second floor: Bedrooms, several with adjoining closets or dressing rooms.
2. Stairways: Main stair at east entrance hall is steep and has winders. A second stair rises in the corner off the original kitchen.
3. Flooring: Random width pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Variable, including plaster, canvas, paper, and paneling. Circular molding in the center of parlor ceiling.

5. Decorative features and trim: Several finely carved mantels imported from Charleston. Simple baseboards, door and window surrounds.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Now surrounded by the buildings of Clemson University, the building's principal entrance (as used by the Calhouns) is on the east facade.
2. Historic landscape design: A number of original plantings remain, including trees which Calhoun received as gifts, such as a varnish tree from Commodore Stephen Decatur, a hemlock from Daniel Webster, and an arborvitae from Henry Clay.
3. Outbuildings: See HABS No. SC-344A and SC-344B.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

National Register of Historic Places Inventory Form.

2. Secondary and published sources:

South Carolina Writers' Project, South Carolina, A Guide to the Palmetto State, American Guide Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 142, 412-414.

The Southern Magazine, Vol. II, No. 10 (March-April, 1936), "The Restoration of Fort Hill" by Mrs. A. G. Holmes.

Harriet Hefner Cook, Fort Hill, John C. Calhoun Shrine (Clemson: Clemson College, S.C., n.d.).

Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), pp. 184, 178, 233, 383, ff.

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Buildings Survey
July, 1984

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